

# LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN NORWAY

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## PRESENTACIÓN

Eva Maagerø es profesora de lengua de la Universidad de Vestfold en Noruega. La Universidad de Valencia tiene establecido con esta universidad un convenio de intercambio de alumnos y profesores dentro del programa Sócrates-Erasmus. En este contexto hemos entablado relaciones prometedoras con profesores del área de lengua y literatura de dicha institución y estamos estudiando la puesta en marcha de un grupo conjunto de trabajo en torno al bilingüismo.

En una reciente visita a Valencia la profesora Maagerø impartió una conferencia sobre la diversidad lingüística y cultural en Noruega y su tratamiento en la escuela. En Noruega conviven diversos dialectos orales del noruego junto con dos versiones oficiales de lengua escrita y dos lenguas no indoeuropeas de las minorías étnicas lapona y finlandesa, a las que hay que añadir las múltiples lenguas de las minorías de inmigrantes. El interés del tema, la singularidad del caso noruego y la oportunidad de estar preparando este número monográfico de *Lenguaje y textos* nos movieron a pedirle un artículo para incluir en nuestra revista. Creemos que puede constituir una interesante contribución al debate en torno al tratamiento de la diversidad lingüística y cultural.

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**Palabras clave:** dialecto, lengua escrita, lengua oficial, plurilingüismo, interculturalidad, lengua y escuela, lengua e identidad.

**Key words:** Dialect, written language, official language, multilingualism, intercultural, language and school, language and identity.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Only 4,5 million Norwegians, two written Norwegian languages, a lot of dialects which have such a strong position that they can be spoken even from the platform in the parliament, and no oral standard language which children are taught in school. This is how the Norwegian language situation is, and it is rather special compared to most societies. Language and culture are always twisted into each other. Language is a meaning making system developed in a culture, and the language situation of a society always tells a lot about the culture and about values and ideology in that particular society. When we

study the language situation in Norway, we will discover that a strong ideology of equality is important. Equality characterises in many ways the Norwegian society. Norway has, for example, no significant upper class, and many would say that equality between men and women is well developed.

In order to present the language situation in Norway, we will start with a brief introduction to the relation between language and landscape. Then we discuss the two written languages and look at the differences between them, where we find them, why we have them (which takes us into history), and the influences of the language situation in school and society in general. We will also present the oral language situation. In the last 30-40 years there has been, as in other Western European societies, a wave of immigration to Norway, above all refugees from conflict areas of the world. This increase in the population makes Norway a linguistically more heterogeneous society than before. Traditionally Sami and Finnish have been the only minority languages in Norway. The development into a linguistically more heterogeneous society will also be touched upon briefly in this article.

## **2. LANGUAGE AND LANDSCAPE**

Norway is a rather large country with a small population. It consists of about 386 975 square km, which averaged out means only about 11 persons for every square kilometre. One should also bear in mind that most people live in and around Oslo and the Oslofjord, along the southern coast and in and around the cities of Stavanger, Bergen and Trondheim. The areas in the middle of Norway, the western and northern coast and also the inland in the North have very few inhabitants. In this long and narrow country<sup>1</sup> with an extremely long coast broken up by many fjords and with mountains and valleys in the middle, communication has always been a challenge. In early times ships were the best way of getting in touch with others. To overcome the mountains in the middle of the country was much more complicated than communication along the coast, and normally only possible in summer. The more urban parts of Norway like Oslo, Drammen, Kristiansand, Stavanger, Bergen and Trondheim are all on the coast and in the southern part of the country. In the rest of Norway small concentrations of houses or rather isolated farms are dominating, which means that the distance to the next city for many Norwegians has been and still is long. The railway, which traditionally connects different parts of most countries, is of course important in Norway too. There are, however, not so many railway lines, partly because of the complicated geographical conditions, partly because of the low number of inhabitants. For example, the railway goes only to Bodø in the northern direction, which means that most of the northern part of the country is without this kind of communication, and must rely on bus, boat and plane. This is sometimes complicated when the weather is extreme, which often happens in this part of the country.

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(1) When you turn Norway around, it goes as far as Rome.

The small population, the large country and the rather complicated geographical and communicative conditions are important to have as a background in order to understand the language situation. These factors may, for example, explain the large variety of dialects which we have in Norway. Let us, however, start with the written languages.

### 3. THE TWO WRITTEN LANGUAGES, *BOKMÅL* AND *NYNORSK*

In this country with only 4,5 million people there are, as mentioned above, two official written Norwegian languages living side by side. They are called *bokmål* (Book Language) and *nynorsk* (New Norwegian). The majority of the Norwegian population uses *bokmål* – about 85 % – and the rest – about 15 % - uses *nynorsk*. *Bokmål* is therefore clearly the majority language. In 1885 parliament (Stortinget) decided that the two languages should have an equal status, and they were both declared official, which they still are today. In many societies there are several official languages, for example, in Switzerland with German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic, in Canada with English and French, and in Finland with Finnish and Swedish. In these societies the official languages are, however, linguistically different languages, which means that they are so different from each other that they have to be learned as foreign languages. Finnish and Swedish for example even belong to different language families (Finnish Ugrian and Indo European). In Norway, however, the two written languages *bokmål* and *nynorsk* are both Norwegian and so similar that they can both be understood by all Norwegians without any problems. Actually, the differences between *bokmål* and *nynorsk* are so minimal that it is linguistically impossible to talk about these two written realisations of Norwegian as two languages; therefore the notion ‘written norms’ are often used.

#### 3. 1. *How different are bokmål and nynorsk?*

The small differences between the two written norms are found mainly in the following areas:

- In lexicon (but not very often), for example *erfaring* (bokmål) and *røynsle* (nynorsk), which means ‘experience’, or *veileder* (bokmål) and *rettleiar* (nynorsk), which means ‘tutor’.
- In the grammar (morphology), for example *biler* (bokmål) and *bilar* (nynorsk) – ‘cars’, *penere* (bokmål) and *penare* (nynorsk) – ‘more beautiful’ and *kommer* (bokmål) and *kjem* (nynorsk) – ‘comes’.
- In the use of prefixes and suffixes, which originally are not Norwegian or Nordic, but come from, for example, the German influence in the Hanseatic period. In bokmål these elements of foreign origin are accepted, while they are normally not accepted in nynorsk, for example *kjærlighet* (bokmål – with the German suffix *-het*) and *kjærleik* (nynorsk – with the Norwegian suffix *-leik*) – the noun ‘love’, *anmerkning* (bokmål – with the German prefix *an-*) and *merknad* (nynorsk – without prefix) – the noun ‘remark’ and *behandle* (bokmål – with the German prefix *be-*) and *handsame* (nynorsk – without prefix) – ‘treat’.

—In the phonetic system which also has an influence in the orthography, for example in the adverb *hvorfor* (bokmål) and *kvifor* (nynorsk) – ‘why’, and in the personal pronoun *jeg* (bokmål) and *eg* (nynorsk) – ‘I’.

There are also some differences in syntax and in style. It is often said about *nynorsk* that it has a more verbal style and is closer to oral language than *bokmål* is. You will see the reason for this when we go briefly into history.

The following text extract by Iben Sandemose in *Det vokser ikke hvitløk på Skillebekk* (Garlic doesn’t grow in Skillebekk)<sup>2</sup> first in *bokmål* and then in *nynorsk* may give a certain impression of how different the two written varieties or norms of Norwegian are:

#### BOKMÅL

I det svarte, gamle huset med vill og skrikende blåfarge hadde vi ikke andre dyr enn bestemoren min. Hun var ganske liten, litt krum i ryggen og med svært raske, spenstige ben. Munnen var stor og rød, øynene svarte. Håret krøllet hu med krølltang som ble varmet på platen, da lignet hun en liten løve. Derfor kalte vi henne Simba.

Simba sov med sov-i-ro i ørene og våknet sjelden før utpå dagen. Da var hun Som regel litt kvalm og spiste noen vommeletter. Det er små, hvite piller som smaker som tørr bomull. Jeg passet godt på å ikke bli kvalm.

#### NYNORSK

I det svarte, gamle huset med vill og lysande blåfarge hadde vi ikkje andre dyr enn bestemora mi. Ho var ganske lita, litt krum i ryggen og med svært raske, spenstige bein. Munnen var stor og raud, auga svarte. Håret krølla ho med krølltong som blei varma på plata, då likna ho ei lita løve. Derfor kalla vi henne Simba.

Simba sov med sov-i-ro i øra og vakna sjeldan før utpå dagen. Da var ho som regel litt kvalm og åt nokre vommeletter. Det er små, kvite piller som smakar tørr bomull. Eg passa godt på å ikkje bli kvalm.

### 3. 2. *Where do we find bokmål and nynorsk?*

Bokmål is mainly used in the cities and in the areas with the largest population density. In addition to this, the population in the eastern part and also in the northernmost areas of Norway use bokmål. Nynorsk, however, is used in the western part of Norway, on the coast, along the fjords and partly in the mountain areas. In the Sogn and Fjordane county, which is a central part of Western Norway, nearly all inhabitants use nynorsk. The two written norms are connected not only to geography, but also to identity and culture. Bokmål is often associated with urban culture and an urban way of life. It is also in most cases the language for advertising, pop music, fashion, entertainment, and young people’s culture. It is the language of the weekly magazines and the big newspapers, and also

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(2) The text *Det vokser ikke hvitløk på Skillebekk* is taken from a book by Dahl, Lundeby and Thorp (1996).

of the commercial world and the world of technology. People living in the nynorsk regions, but identifying with urban culture, will probably choose bokmål.

Nynorsk, however, is often associated with traditional and national values and with regional or local culture. Writing nynorsk might be a signal that your identity is more related to local values than to urban style, and that your local roots are of great importance to you. Nynorsk might therefore be used by local banks and businesses, and is also, to a certain degree, the language of the primary industry (farming, forestry and fishing). In addition to this there are of course nynorsk users in the more urban areas of Norway too, people who have moved from the rural districts, but still want to keep their language identity, or people who might have lived in a town all their lives, but still want to show that their identity is more related to rural values than to urban values. Nynorsk also has a strong position in the academic world, especially in humanities. Authors write in both languages, also modern authors, and one publishing house in Oslo, *Det norske Samlaget*, only publishes books in nynorsk while one theatre, also in Oslo, *Det norske teatret*, only uses manuscripts in nynorsk. There are some regions in Norway, for example Trøndelag in the middle of the country, or in the valleys in the more eastern areas, where both bokmål and nynorsk are used in the communities.

The use of bokmål and nynorsk therefore shows a colourful picture which is not always easy to overview, and the choice of written language is, as we have seen, really related to cultural values and to a person's identity. The distribution of the two written norms has been constant for many years. Nynorsk had its largest extension during the last world war. In 1944 34,1% of the population wrote nynorsk, and perhaps this high number can be partly related to the national values important in the war time. Nynorsk is seen by many as more Norwegian than bokmål (see the history of bokmål and nynorsk below). After the war the number of people using nynorsk soon decreased again. In the efficient modern society many people have prophesied, however, that nynorsk would disappear. Till now this has proved to be wrong. Nynorsk is certainly the minority language, but it has shown for many years that it is capable of survival, and is important for many people in Norway and therefore also of importance for the Norwegian society and culture.

### **3. 3. Why bokmål and nynorsk?**

The reason for having two Norwegian and very similar written languages is to be found in the history of Norway. As already mentioned language and society always interact with each other, and sometimes the general development of a society has a strong influence in the language. Political power and linguistic power follow each other. This is obviously the case in Norway. Let us briefly go back to the Viking age. At that time Norway was a free country with a king as leader. The contact with Europe was strong, and the cultural influence from other countries in Europe was significant. The Latin alphabet was introduced in Norway about year 1000, and a written language was developed. A lot of texts were written in the old Norse language, the language used in Norway and Iceland during the Viking age. Especially in Iceland, the literal activities were vivid

through sagas and poems and also through the work of the great author Snorre Sturlason. In Norway the king's seat was always important for the development of the written standard. First the king lived in Nidaros (today Trondheim), then Bjørgvin (today Bergen) and then Oslo, and the written language was flavoured by the oral language in the different places. When the plague (the Black Death) came to Norway in 1349, Norway had had a well-developed written language for more than two centuries.

The plague was a catastrophe for Norway as well as for many other countries in Europe. The competence of reading and writing was in the Viking age in most cases related to the church and the monasteries. In the plague many priests, monks and nuns died because they took care of ill persons, and were eventually infected themselves. Consequently, the competence in literacy nearly disappeared. At the same time Norway also suffered from an economic depression which weakened the position of the country for many years.

Politically it was also an exciting time. The Norwegian king Håkon VI, who had married the Danish princess Margreta, died in 1380, and Margreta became the queen of both Denmark and Norway. Now a union between the two countries was established with Danish leadership. In 1397 Sweden became a part of the union, which was called the Kalmar union because the agreement between Sweden and Denmark-Norway was signed in the Swedish town Kalmar. Sweden left the union, however, in 1523.

The union with Denmark lasted for more than 400 years, till 1814. In the first years Norway had a rather strong position in the union with its own state council, which was able to make important decisions for the country. After some years, however, Norway's status was reduced, and the country was treated as any other Danish region. As mentioned above language and power always belong together, and this political situation had a strong influence in the language. The Danes, having the power, did not need to learn or use the Norwegian language. Danes occupied every important position in Norway, and they used Danish when they spoke, and everything they wrote was of course also in Danish. In the first years after the union laws and letters among, for example, farmers were written in Norwegian, but year by year the position of Danish as written language was strengthened. After a while Danish had taken over as the written language in Norway, and old Norse as a written norm had disappeared.

In the process of increasing the position of Danish in Norway three things in particular were of great importance. The first was the art of printing. In 1462 Johan Gutenberg succeeded in inventing a printing press so that books could be mass-produced. Till then books had been hand written on calfskin. This took a long time and was expensive, and only few people had access to books. Now books were spread out to a larger part of the population. The books that were produced in Denmark-Norway were all in Danish. This fact helped Danish as a written language to reach out to people in Norway. The second thing was the reformation of the church. In 1536 it was decided that the Lutheran church and not the Catholic should be the church of Denmark-Norway. In this church Latin was abandoned in the services, and the Bible and other religious books were translated into

the national language of the different countries so that people were able to understand the holy texts. In Norway's case the Bible and other religious texts were translated into Danish and distributed to the population, and Danish clergymen held the services in Norwegian churches in Danish. This of course also strengthened the position of Danish as the written language in Norway. The third thing happened in the 18th century. At that time it was decided that young people should have a better education in connection with their confirmation of their promise to the church which had been given for them at their baptism. They should know more about the Bible and the church so that they knew what they promised. In 1736 it was decided that all young people should learn to read and write in connection with their confirmation. The language they learned to read and write was Danish.

When we enter the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Danish was therefore the written language in Norway. The written Norwegian languages did not exist any more. Even the laws were written in Danish in Kristian V's law book from 1683 and 1687. All literature, prose and poetry, written during these years were in Danish. Norwegian authors like Petter Dass (1647-1707) sometimes used one or another Norwegian word in their texts in order to create a local colour, but still the language was Danish.

1814 is an extremely important year in the history of Norway. In this year Norway leaves the union with Denmark and joins a union with Sweden which lasts till 1905. The reason for this was that Denmark had been on Napoleon's side in the Napoleonic war while Sweden had fought against Napoleon. Denmark on the losing side had to give Norway to Sweden on the victorious side. Many people in Norway, however, hoped that this would be an opportunity to become a free nation. 112 men (no women) from all parts of Norway met in Eidsvoll north of Oslo in order to give Norway a constitution and establish a parliament. The Danish prince Christian Fredrik was invited to Norway as a future king. The Eidsvoll men managed in a short and hectic time to write a new and rather progressive constitution for Norway and to establish a parliament (Stortinget), but not to avoid the union with Sweden.

These years when the dreams for freedom were strong, it was very embarrassing for Norway to keep Danish as its written language. Most people in Norway spoke at that time a Norwegian dialect, but all people who could write used Danish. Language is often seen as a symbol of a people and of a nation. When people fight for freedom, they often also fight for their language. This can be seen through the history of many peoples of Europe, but also, for example, when Africans fought against the colonial powers, when Indians fight for their rights in America today, or when minority populations fight against the power of a majority in Asian countries. It was important also for Norway to get a written Norwegian language even if Norway was in a new union with Sweden.

In the language discussion two ways to get a written Norwegian language were pointed out. One way was to make Danish Norwegian step by step by integrating Norwegian words and expressions, grammatical elements and syntax in the existing Danish language. Danish is a Nordic language close to Norwegian, and therefore this was seen as a lin-

guistically possible, pragmatic way of doing it. It would take some time, but this would give people an opportunity to change their language habits over time. This point of view was supported and also developed by the author Henrik Wergeland (1808-45) and later by the teacher Knud Knudsen (1812-95). In practice Peder Christian Asbjørnsen (1813-82) and Jørgen Moe (1812-85) followed this pattern when they collected and wrote down Norwegian folktales and myths in the 1840s. This language became bokmål. The other way of making a written Norwegian language was developed by Ivar Aasen (1813-96) and supported by professor P. A. Munch (1810-63) at the university in Kristiania (Oslo from 1925). Aasen believed that Danish could be never changed into Norwegian. In his opinion this would be too unsystematic. He wanted to collect information about the dialects from all parts of Norway and build a new written Norwegian language based on these. When it was difficult to make a choice between different dialects, he would compare with Old Norse from the Viking age. Aasen did this work himself. For four years he walked around in Norway on foot and collected information about the dialects, and then he construed a new Norwegian language which was introduced through a dictionary, a grammar and also through fiction, drama and poetry that Aasen wrote himself. This language became nynorsk. The Norwegian parliament decided in 1885, as already mentioned, that both written languages should be the official written languages of Norway.

In a long period in the 20<sup>th</sup> century bokmål and nynorsk were made closer to each other by intensive language planning by the department of education and the parliament. This work has, however, stopped, and from ca. 1980 they have developed as two parallel written Norwegian languages (or written norms). The authorities have supported the idea that they are both important linguistic and cultural resources in Norway, and that they therefore should have equal status. Every individual should have the right to use each one of them. Because nynorsk is used by less people, the official policy is that nynorsk must be positively discriminated by extra steps taken by the state. One of these steps is the Nynorsk Competence Centre, which was opened in 2005. This centre shall give information on nynorsk, give advice to schools about nynorsk education and also do research connected to the nynorsk language.

### ***3. 4. The two written languages in school***

Both written languages have, as already mentioned, an equal official status, which means that both have to be learned by children in school. When children start school at the age of six, they choose one of them as their main language which, for example, will be their language for the introduction of reading and writing. Pupils normally choose the language which is mostly used in the place where they live. However, if as many as ten pupils want to have the other written language, the school will have to organise an extra class for them. The language chosen in the first year will normally be the language the pupils continue to have in and outside school in the following years and through their life. They shall meet the other written language through different kinds of texts like stories, essays, articles etc., during primary school. This is mentioned very clearly in the curriculum. In secondary school, however, the students must learn the other written language



more actively; they shall study the grammar, and they shall use it as a working language, which means that they write texts in the other language too. The other written language should not be handled as something strange and different, but as a potential and as a variety of Norwegian. The focus should be on similarities, not differences. Before leaving the compulsory secondary school (10 years), the students have exams in order to show their competence in both written languages. If they continue to upper secondary school for three more years, as many young people in Norway do, they continue with both written languages if they choose the general subjects leading to further studies at university. For these students there will be two exams in the subject Norwegian. One exam has to be written in their main language, and one has to be written in the other Norwegian language. A student who is undergoing teacher training must master both bokmål and nynorsk, and the same is demanded of the students studying Norwegian as his or her mother tongue at university.

All textbooks in all subjects in Norway are published in two parallel editions, one in bokmål and one in nynorsk. The parallel editions shall appear at the same time so that all students have equal opportunity to get good learning material in their own language. This is expensive for the publishers, and therefore there have been experiments with books having one chapter in nynorsk, another in bokmål. The evaluations of these books, however, have not always been positive.

There is of course discussion among students and their parents and teachers whether so much time should be spent on learning two very similar written languages in school. Some people think that this time could be used to develop a better genre competence, higher insight in literature, a better orthography in the main language etc. There are also people who insist that it is sufficient to read texts written in both languages, but that it is unnecessary to learn both actively. Others emphasise that the situation with the two different written languages is so significant for the Norwegian culture that both should be part of the school curriculum. To learn both written languages is to experience the rich potential of linguistic possibilities of Norwegian.

### ***3. 5. Bokmål and nynorsk outside school***

Official languages also have to be represented in the official Norway: that means in all official organs like state and regional administration, the official health care, the educational institutions, the police, the post etc. All people who work in institutions like these must be able to write both bokmål and nynorsk. All official documents coming from these institutions are in both written languages. That means that everybody can choose if he or she wants the diploma from university, the tax form or the wedding paper in bokmål or nynorsk. Some years ago a man refused to accept a fine for driving too fast, because the police did not have a paper in nynorsk. The papers in the post offices and the health stations are also in two versions. On the bank notes the name of the country can be written in two ways, *Norge*, which is bokmål, or *Noreg*, which is nynorsk, and the same can be seen on stamps. In Norway there are two television channels and several radio channels run by the state, and they are therefore a part of the official Norway. Films and other programmes are subtitled in Norway, not dubbed. The texts are in both written

languages, and it has been decided that 75 % of the texts shall be in bokmål and 25 % in nynorsk. The persons reading the news or the programme overviews in radio and television should also use both languages.

## 4. SPOKEN NORWEGIAN

### 4. 1. *The dialects*

As mentioned above, people in Norway speak dialects, and there is no standard spoken language taught in Norwegian schools. There are many dialects in Norway and we can find one important reason for this in the relations between the Norwegian landscape, the small population and the communication conditions (see above). In modern Norway many ways of communication have been developed, and people move around much more than they did before; sometimes because they want to go to school or university in more urban areas, sometimes because they get a new job in another part of the country. People have more contact with people from other places, and when people meet, different ways of speaking meet. The small differences between local neighbouring dialects have therefore disappeared, and larger dialect areas, so-called regional dialects, have developed (Skjekkeland 1997:22). The regional dialects are strong in Norway, and you can nearly always hear where a person comes from. Most people appreciate to hear other people saying for example: "I can hear that you come from the South" or "Aren't you from the Trondheim area? I can hear it from the way you speak." The dialect tells about a person's geographical identity, and roots like these are important in Norway. It is said, for example, that Norwegians ask where a person comes from before they ask for the person's name. The linguistic differences between the dialects are not so large that they cause problems of communication between people from different places in the country, and this makes it easier to keep the dialect also when a person moves to a new place.

Dialects are in general looked upon as valuable in the Norwegian society, and they can be used and are tolerated in all situations, also in official situations like in parliament, political meetings, academic contexts, speeches, job interviews, television programmes etc. Many Norwegian prime ministers have used their dialects, and this has given them a homely touch which may even have been a positive element in the elections. Professors may use their dialects when they give lectures, and dialects are used on the stage in all the regional theatres in Norway.

Some people might, however, have reasons for making their spoken language closer to written language; that means that they use for example grammatical elements which can be found in bokmål or nynorsk. Some also have the spoken language in Western Oslo as an ideal. This is, however, always an individual choice made consciously or unconsciously by the person him- or herself. A person will, of course, have many reasons for making a choice like this. The language you use always tells something about you, and a person may want to be associated with an urban life style by talking the language of the capital, or give a serious impression by being close to the grammar and the wording of the written language. Young people who want to stay and work in the place they come from, seem to use the local dialect more than young people who dream of a life in Oslo or in a big city in another country.

#### ***4. 2. No spoken Norwegian standard language***

In many societies students have to learn a standard spoken language when they come to school. Dialects are regarded as the language for private and informal contexts while the standard language is for communication in more formal and official situations in society. The standard spoken language has in many societies developed from the spoken language in the capital. The capital is a centre for power, economy and culture, and all these things put together give the language of the capital prestige. In this matter Norway is different. For many years Copenhagen was the capital (see above), and Copenhagen Danish could never be a linguistic reference for the population in Norway. Oslo has been the capital since 1905. It takes, however, time to develop the status of a standard spoken language. Even if the spoken language in Oslo among some people may have a high status, the population has never accepted it as a spoken standard for everybody. Here the strong value of equality is important. Why should the Oslo way of speaking be better than any other dialect? Why should my way of speaking not be good enough? The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1991) once said that if you invest in a standard language privately or in school or both, your investment should give you a profit of increased cultural capital. If your investment does not give you this profit, why should you invest? This seems to be the case in Norway. Most people find that they do not need to do this investment effort. They live well with their dialect.

In school all children therefore speak their own dialects, and the use of dialects is promoted. The school law says that the pupils can use the language they speak at home also in school, and the teacher shall in his or her choice of words and expressions show consideration for the pupils. Teachers cannot correct children when they speak their dialect or express negative attitudes to a student's dialect. The curriculum emphasises that dialects are people's primary language, and all dialects shall be tolerated and treated respectfully. In primary school students start to learn about other dialects and observe differences in the dialects, and in secondary school they shall learn about changes in dialects over time, and also about internal and external developments causing changes in oral language. In addition to this they shall learn about the language situation and the language policy. This tells us that the use of dialect, the primary language, is supported by the authorities in school policy and in the curriculum in Norway.

### **5. MINORITY LANGUAGES IN NORWAY**

#### ***5. 1. Traditional minority languages***

As mentioned above, there are two traditional minority languages in Norway, Sami (or Lappish) and Kvensk<sup>3</sup> (close to Finnish). The Sami language has always existed in Norway, because the Sami people have been in the country as long as the Norwegians have. Their language is very different from the Nordic languages. It even belongs, as mentioned above, to another language family called the Finnish-Ugrian language family together with languages like Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian. The rather small Sami

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(3) Here the Norwegian word is used for this language because an English word does not exist.

population (ca. 60-70 000) lives in large areas in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia (about 40 000 in Norway), and their language differs much from place to place, so much that we can talk about different Sami languages and not dialects. For example, the Sami people in the middle of Norway can hardly understand the Sami people of the North and vice versa. Today it is said that the largest group of Sami people in Norway live in Oslo.

In Norway the Sami people have not always been treated respectfully. The policy was for a long time hard towards the Sami people; they should be assimilated in Norwegian society as effectively as possible. Their language and culture were suppressed, and a law said that you had to be able to speak Norwegian in order to own land in Norway. In school the children should learn Norwegian, but not as a foreign language. They met Norwegian in all subjects from the very first day; their teachers spoke Norwegian only, and it was forbidden to speak Sami in the breaks or even sing the traditional Sami songs (joik) in school. It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the assimilation policy changed, and the Sami children today have their own curriculum in school where all subjects are taught in Sami, and Norwegian is taught as a foreign language. The Sami people in Norway have also had their own parliament since 1989, and here the promotion of Sami language and culture has been particularly important.

Kvensk is a language quite close to Finnish. It has been regarded as a Finnish dialect, but in 2005 it was given the status of a separate language. It has been a minority language in Norway since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Finnish people immigrated mainly to the north of Norway and to the forest areas on the south-eastern border to Sweden. They were called kvener. The reason for coming to Norway was often lack of food in the northern part of Finland. Kvensk has been the mother tongue of rather small groups of people in towns like Vardø and Vadsø in Finnmark in the north. In Finnskogen, the forest area in the south, the Finnish language has now disappeared. Kvensk was treated badly, like Sami, by the Norwegian authorities for a long time. Today, however, children can study kvensk in schools in Finnmark, and the status as a language and not a Finnish dialect might be a support for the development of kvensk language and culture in Norway in the future. Still there are people who have the opinion that a border between kvensk and Finnish has been drawn by recognising kvensk as a language, and that this border destroys the natural contact between the two languages.

## *5. 2. The new minority languages*

Since the 1960s Norway has experienced a wave of immigration like most Western European countries. About 349 000 immigrants from mostly African and Asian countries<sup>4</sup> live in Norway today. This means that about 120 different languages are present in Norway at the moment. This is a new and interesting situation which represents both a resource and a challenge. It is a resource because the immigrant population has a language competence which covers a large number of languages in the world. Their language competence consists of their mother tongue which many millions of people may

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(4) Scandinavian immigrants have been in Norway for a long time. There are also many people from Britain living in Norway.

speak (for example, Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, Spanish, Russian etc), and in addition to their mother tongue, many immigrants speak several other languages too. For example, a person from Somalia may speak Somali as mother tongue, Italian because of the colonial power, Arabic for religious reasons and also Swahili in order to communicate with other Africans. This language competence can be of great importance for international cooperation in business, culture, technology, academic matters etc., in the continuously globalising world. Unfortunately, the Norwegian society has so far not managed to exploit this resource. The language diversity is also a resource in school. Comparison of languages both lexically and grammatically may give the students a strengthened linguistic consciousness and knowledge, and insight into other language situations and other people's culture is important in a world with many conflicts. However interesting this may be, these features have not been exploited or been paid much attention to by Norwegian authorities.

The many languages are also challenging for Norway. Immigrant children and adults must learn Norwegian in a good and efficient way in order to become active members of society, and to have an influence in their own situation. In addition to this, it is important that all immigrants can keep and develop their mother tongue. This language competence makes it possible for them to have contact with the society they come from, with relatives and friends and with their original culture. In Norway this matter is not considered as an overall private responsibility, but as a task of the government. Mother tongue teachers are therefore important in school both in order to develop the mother tongue to a high level, and also to create a 'bridge' between the home culture and the Norwegian culture. Teachers with a minority background may offer new important knowledge in all subjects by bringing other cultural perspectives into the lessons. In this way it is possible to develop a multicultural content in school.

## **6. SUMMING UP**

In this article the language situation in Norway has been described and discussed. It has been pointed out that language and culture belong together, and that language is also related to power. The language situation tells a lot about a society, about values and ideologies and also about tolerance and respect. On the other hand, it is impossible to understand the language situation of a society without knowing about the history and development of that society. It has been emphasised that equality is an important value in Norwegian society. In relation to language this value or ideology means that also the ca. 15% of the population using nynorsk shall have the same rights as the 85% using bokmål, and that dialects as the primary language for every individual are considered by most people acceptable and relevant in all situations. For a long time equality did not include the Sami and Kven population. In modern Norway, however, their situation has clearly improved. In relation to the new language minorities it takes time to understand and exploit their language competence as a potential in society in general and in school. Many people are, however, of the opinion that it is important to give good opportunities for everybody to develop their mother tongue.

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